GUIDE TO THE RI3 ABKHAZ FILE

[The Abkhaz are located between the southwestern slopes of the Greater Caucasus Mountains and a narrow strip along the Black Sea coast in the extreme northwest of the Georgian SSR in the Soviet Union. Today this area is the Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The Abkhaz call themselves Apswa (Aphsua) and their region, Apsny (Aphsn). They have been part of the Georgian political territory since the Middle Ages. The most current figures (January 1, 1968) for the population of the republic are 477,000 in an area of 3,300 square miles. Abkhaz is a Northwestern Caucasian language closely related to Circassian and Ubykh. There are five major dialects, two of which have been reduced to writing. The Abkhaz have preserved their tribal organization, and in 1926 the republic was composed of 24 or 25 kin groups or communities. They have been only slightly affected by their literate Georgian neighbors. A group of approximately 13,000 (1926) Abkhaz live to the north across the Caucasus in the Cherkes region. They are known as Abaza and speak two of the five Abkhaz dialects as well as Circassian.

There are four sources in the Abkhaz file. Two are in English (3 and 4), one is a translation from the German (2), and one is from the Russian (1). 2: Byhan is the most general of the sources and would probably serve as the best introduction. It contains data on material culture, social organization, religion, and art, as well as comparable data on other Caucasian groups. 1: Dzhanashvili is largely concerned with Abkhaz religious beliefs, but it also contains some general ethnographic material. 3: Janashia also concerns Abkhaz religious beliefs as well as the ceremonies, and is based on materials collected in a southern village. 4: Janashia is a brief article discussing the

duality of the Abkhaz deity through an analysis of its name. It is based on material collected from the same village as in source no. 3.

This file provides a brief description of the traditional Abkhaz culture, with an emphasis on their religion. It does not contain data on its social, economic, or political position within the Soviet Union. Information on these areas may be found in the RI1 Georgia file (see especially source no. 5) and the R1 Soviet Union file (especially source no. 21). The file was processed between 1963 and 1967.]